

## **Module 7**

### **Life In The Kingdom: Discovering What It Means To Live Along The River**







## Module 7: Life In The Kingdom - Discovering What It Means To Live Along The River

### Introduction To Life Along The River

It has always been, and continues to be, the heart of God to do three things: He is building His Kingdom, He is calling our His People, and He is pouring out His River. And He wants to do all three in your house! This Module is not another discussion regarding a philosophy or theology of house church. There are plenty of books, pamphlets and papers available out there that discuss the “theory” of house churches and why they are better, more biblical, etc. This isn’t one of those books. This Module is about some of the practical aspects of actually functioning as the *ekklesia* which meets in your home. It is about what it means to be the people of God who live their lives along the banks of God’s River. It’s about what it means to be an extended family that worships and serves God as a believing community. If you can’t apply your theory, theology or philosophy in a meaningful way that fits the facts and realities of life then you have a very big problem.

To put this another way, if Christianity were (or is) really as hard and complicated as we have made it in the traditional church (i.e., you must have a professionally trained pastor and a professionally trained staff, and programs for every age group, etc.), Christianity never would have survived the first two centuries of its existence. Nor would it survive as it does today in closed countries where Christianity is officially (and un-officially) persecuted. In order to survive and grow, Christianity must be simple enough for any average person to understand, to practice (i.e., live out authentically) and to pass along to the next generation.

As a manifestation of the Kingdom of God, House Church can happen anywhere. Neil Cole of Church Multiplication Associates refers to house church as “organic church” because the Church is really an organism that can thrive anywhere believers gather; in an office building, a rented meeting room in a local hotel, a Mexican restaurant (which is where our network started), even in a house. What we don’t want to do is to substitute a new box (like a house) for an old box (a church building). Ultimately, God doesn’t dwell in any man-made box or “swimming pool” where people attempt to capture and control the things of God for their own agendas.

The purpose of the *ekklesia* which meets in your home is to empower believers to love, worship and serve God and to reach out to unbelievers by offering them a Spirit-empowered model of what Christian faith looks like when it is authentically lived out by real people in their everyday lives. The ultimate purpose of the *ekklesia* which meets in your home is to become a manifestation of and a foothold for the Kingdom of God, a channel through which the River of His Spirit can flow unimpeded into the neighborhood & community around you. As God’s *ekklesia* we are part of a Kingdom which is nourished by a river. We are the spiritual trees which grow along the banks of that River of God’s Spirit, and God desires to use our “leaves” to heal the nations (starting with your neighborhood!).



*Let the River flow . . .*

### Samuel Wesley Had A Swimming Pool

The problem of dysfunctional “swimming pool” churches that don’t meet the needs of those under its care is not a new problem. Just ask Samuel Wesley. Better yet, ask his wife Susanna. If you don’t recognize the names of Samuel and Susanna Wesley, then perhaps you’ll remember two of his sons, John and Charles Wesley. In the early 1700s Samuel Wesley was the Anglican Rector of the small parish of Epworth in England. It was in that Rectory at Epworth that Samuel and his wife, Susanna, raised their family of 9 children and where Samuel served as pastor of the parish church. In the winter of 1711-12 Samuel was called away to London on Church business for several months. In his absence Samuel arranged for a fellow pastor (one Reverend Inman) to preach and minister in his place (in other words, to supervise the swimming pool) until he could return.

That was a mistake. The man had little or no preaching ability, and people liked him even less than his sermons. When neighbors and members of the congregation learned that Susanna was holding devotions for her children at home on Sunday evening they began asking to attend. Soon, there were forty people attending Susanna’s Sunday evening devotionals. Susanna would read prayers, one of Samuel’s sermons and then devotional topics would be discussed. Soon the crowd of 40 had grown to over 200 people crowding into the small rectory on Sunday evening to hear Susanna read Samuel’s sermons.

The Reverend Inman took great offense at such a “scandal.” People were neglecting the Sunday morning services and attending Susanna’s evening meeting instead. Inman wrote and complained to Samuel in London. Samuel wrote to his wife, expressing his concern that she should be supporting the interim preacher and encouraging her to discontinue these evening meetings. His objections were three-fold. **First**, that the Sunday evening meetings “will look particular” (i.e., peculiar); **second**, that she was a woman and therefore should not be leading such meetings; and, **third**, that he (Samuel) had a “public station” to protect. But Susanna Wesley was not a woman easily deterred from what she believed to be God’s will.

## A Kingdom, A People & A River - Page 126

She wrote back to Samuel and addressed his concerns. She reminded him that in "our corrupt age" the genuine work of God always looks peculiar. As to her being a woman she reminded Samuel that in addition to being a woman she was also the "mistress of a large family" which he, in his absence, had entrusted to her care and that the evening family devotions were part of her attempt to see to their spiritual condition. The fact that the children had told their friends who had told their parents and that those parents now asked permission to attend the meetings was not a matter of blame upon her.

*"But I never did positively presume to hope that God would make use of me as an instrument in doing good; the farthest I ever did go was, 'It may be: who can tell? With God all things are possible.' I will resign myself to him; or as Herbert better expresses it,*

*Only, since God doth often make  
Of lowly matter, for high uses meet,  
I throw me at His feet;  
There will I lie until my Maker seek  
For some mean stuff whereon to show His skill;  
Then is my time.*

When Samuel raised new objections in a subsequent letter and expressed his desire that she discontinue the meetings Susanna wrote back and told him that she would reluctantly stop the meetings if he specifically instructed her to do so. *"If you do after all think fit to dissolve this assembly, do not tell me any more that you desire me to do it, for that will not satisfy my conscience; but send me your positive command in such full and express terms as may absolve me from all guilt and punishment for neglecting this opportunity of doing good to souls, when you and I shall appear before the great and awful tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ."* No letter containing such instructions ever arrived, and Samuel's return home soon brought an end to this extra-ordinary "house church" meeting.

Upon his return to Epworth Samuel discontinued the special evening meetings at the Rectory. The crowds dissipated (without returning to the parish church) and life at the "Church swimming pool" returned to "normal". Samuel Wesley, and the Church under his care, was a prisoner of a traditional church box that had taken his mind prisoner long before it had captured his congregation. He saw the Kingdom of God as a public swimming pool to be managed by properly trained and appointed caretakers. He hadn't even noticed that the River of God had, for a brief time, flowed through his own home in great power. That's the problem with church swimming pools and their caretakers; they tend to view the River as a threat, not a blessing.

I have included this story of Susanna and Samuel Wesley because it illustrates many of the phenomena that we are seeing today in the house church movement. You might say that house church is a concept that has been struggling to be re-born into the life of God's people for nearly 300 years! So many of the questions and concerns of today's house church movement are not new. They are at least 300 years old! What do you do when traditional institutional churches no longer meet the needs of those under their care? What about women in leadership? Don't house churches look "peculiar" when compared with traditional church ministry? (The River of God always looks peculiar, which is why people want to tame and trap it in man made swimming pools which they can control and understand.) What about traditional pastors who feel threatened and "scandalized" by the rise of house churches in their midst? All of these issues (and others) would re-surface and present fresh challenges to the Church thirty years later during the great Evangelical Awakening and under the ministry of Samuel & Susanna's son, John.

### John Wesley Discovered A River And Became A Channel

John Wesley was nine years old during the "evening prayers controversy." We don't really know how much he understood of what occurred, but in his later evangelistic career Wesley demonstrated that he was keenly aware of the shortcomings of the institutional church of which he remained a part until the day of his death.

John Wesley regarded evangelism (and therefore the salvation of an individual) as more of a process than an event (he had long and spirited discussions with his Moravian friends over the issue of instantaneous regeneration and salvation), unlike most evangelism today where the focus is upon an event that results in a decision which is assumed to coincide with regeneration. This process of salvation had been Wesley's own experience. Wesley regarded all of his searchings and efforts prior to his Aldersgate experience in 1738 (his education at Oxford, ordination to Anglican ministry in 1728, leadership of the Holy Club, missionary activity to Georgia in 1735) as the time of his "awakening" to the things of God during which the Spirit of God was working on his conscience. This "awakening" finally culminated at "about quarter before nine" in the evening of May 24, 1738 when he felt his heart strangely warmed and realized that he trusted "in Christ, Christ alone for salvation."

In his subsequent preaching ministry throughout the chapels, by-ways and fields of England Wesley regarded those who responded as people whom the Spirit had "awakened." Whether or not they were "regenerate" could only be determined

over a period of time during which the individual must be given pastoral care and close examination. All of these "awakened" respondents were invited to attend Wesley's Methodist Society meetings. *"There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies,"* Wesley wrote; *"a desire 'to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins.'"*

A problem soon arose. The River of God's Spirit was beginning to flow in great power and revival. Wesley's preaching ministry was so successful that in the year 1743 alone one thousand new members were added to his London Society. This kind of rapid growth presented a problem for personal pastoral care and supervision. How were so many "awakened" seekers to be supervised and encouraged, and false professors weeded out? Wesley was adamant regarding the necessity of constant, personal pastoral care. *"How grievously are they mistaken who imagine that as soon as the children are born they need take no more care of them,"* he wrote. But how could he personally minister to so many?

The answer began in Bristol where Wesley's Society had grown to 1,100 people. A society member by the name of Foy suggested that one person call on eleven others during the week to inquire of their status. The Bristol Society was quickly transformed, *"In a while, some [class leaders] informed me that they found such and such a one did not live as he ought. It struck me immediately, 'This is one thing, the very thing we have wanted so long.'"* These weekly visitations soon became weekly class meetings, *"This was the origin of our classes at London,"* he wrote, *"for which I can never sufficiently praise God, the unspeakable usefulness of the institution having ever since been more and more manifest."* Soon, every Methodist Society was broken into smaller Classes of 12 persons who met weekly with a Class Leader for pastoral care, examination, encouragement and exhortation. According to Wesley, *"Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to 'bear one another's burdens,' and naturally to 'care for each other.' As they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for, each other."*

The Wesleyan "Class," consisting of 12 people meeting together to pursue the discipline of Christian godliness, became the centerpiece of Methodism for the next 100 years, until the mid-1800s. It was in the Class that the "awakened" were disciplined, examined and instructed, and where they shared mutual fellowship and learned to bear one another's burdens. It was in the Class that the "Rules" (those standards of behavior expected of every Methodist) were read and where individuals were examined to see if they were sincere in their desire to live according to Methodist discipline.

Like his mother thirty years earlier, John Wesley sought to solve the problem of a dysfunctional institutional church while meeting the spiritual needs of new believers who were being swept into the Kingdom of God through the on-going revival. It was a "church within a church," a house church structure within the larger structure of the Anglican Church (of which Wesley insisted that Methodism remain a part throughout his lifetime). By so doing Wesley created a structure that accomplished at least three important tasks. **First**, he created a structure that could handle the increasing fruit of widespread revival and could offer a secure fellowship in which new converts and young believers could be nurtured and disciplined. **Second**, he created a structure flexible enough to serve as a channel for the River of God as it flowed while avoiding the temptation to create a man-made swimming pool to control what God was doing. **Third**, he created a persecution resistant structure that withstood the sporadic and sometimes intense persecution that Methodists experienced at the hands of the institutional church. Unfortunately, within 50 years of Wesley's death (in 1791) the Methodist "Class" structure began to break down into swimming pools.<sup>75</sup>

New times and new challenges combine with old dysfunctions to demand new wineskins. That is what happened to Susanna Wesley, and to John Wesley, and it is happening again today. And I believe that, in His sovereign Providence, God is raising up the house church movement as today's "new" wineskin. And now it is time to "Just do it!"



*Let the River flow . . .*

### Enter The "Nike Church" - Just Do It!

Perhaps you've heard of the seven Churches of Asia Minor, found in the first 3 Chapters of the book of Revelation. Well, the Church of Nike wasn't one of them, but it probably should have been. Nike, of course, is the sports apparel company that specializes in cheap labor and expensive footwear. They also have a marketing slogan that we could learn a lot from: *Just Do It!* When it comes to becoming the Church that meets in your house, you and I simple need to **"just do it!"**

One of the first questions people considering house church want to ask is, *"How do you get started?"* When it comes to getting started and becoming the church that meets in our houses there are many reasons why we don't "just do it." There's

---

<sup>75</sup>For an excellent treatment of the origins, functioning and demise of the Wesleyan "Class of 12" structure, see David Francis Holsclaw, *"The Demise of Disciplined Christian Fellowship: The Methodist Class Meeting in Nineteenth-Century America,"* A Doctoral Dissertation in History in the Graduate Division of the University of California, Davis, 1982.

## A Kingdom, A People & A River - Page 128

the fear of failure that springs from not knowing exactly what to do and being afraid that we won't "do it right." We want to wait until we've figured out "the program" so we can do it just right. One of the reasons for this is that we have been "ruined by example," namely by an institutional model of "church" which has trained us to sit passively in a pew while the "professional staff" perform a "well scripted" program on Sunday morning. After watching this well orchestrated and complicated performance we tell ourselves, "I can't do that." And, of course, we're right! We can't do "that." But then the good news is that God doesn't want you or me to do "that"! It is a false model of what church should be. At a very basic level, **THAT'S NOT CHURCH!** So, it is NOT the goal of house church to become small copies of the larger failed institutional models we left behind. God simply desires that we gather together and worship Him in spirit and in truth. Everything else is flexible and negotiable! And to do that, you don't need any professional training or a pre-printed bulletin. ***All you & I really need is to just do it!***

### O.K. Let's Apply This

- ⇒ **Post Modern Application:** Post Moderns are looking for reality and spontaneity, not something that is the product of a committee meeting. They want to experience being part of a movement, not a program. Sharing things over a meal also serves to fulfill the Post Modern desire for relationships and community building. Flexibility and spontaneity are important expressions of what it means to function as an extended family. Don't over complicate or "over-think" things. Just do it!
- ⇒ Plan a potluck with some like-minded folk who want to experience "ekklesia in the home"
  - ❑ During the potluck, talk about what God is doing in your life. (Answered prayers, something God showed you from the Word, a significant dream you recently had, etc.
  - ❑ At some point in the potluck, celebrate the Lord's Supper. Have juice and bread available. Read Paul's words to the house churches in Corinth found in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.
- ⇒ After the meal, gather to worship and pray.
  - ❑ Ask if anyone has a devotional thought they want to share; a Scripture that spoke to them over the past week, or something else God has spoken to them about.
  - ❑ Have worship CDs with worship songs that are familiar and easy to sing;
  - ❑ As you worship, encourage everyone to wait on God and listen for His voice of encouragement and direction in the meeting. Silence before the Lord is a good thing. Learn to pray and wait on God.



*Let the River flow . . . and don't be afraid to simply step out and "just do it"!*

### Baggage Check






When I was in seminary in the early 1980s in Denver, plans were announced to replace the existing Stapleton Airport with a new regional airport outside of the City. It took twenty years of planning and building for the new Denver International Airport (DIA) to become a reality. As the day approached for the "grand opening" of the new airport there was a glitch. The airport authority had spent literally hundreds of millions of dollars on a new computerized and automated system to handle passenger baggage. The trouble was that it didn't work. The opening of the new multi-billion airport facility had to be delayed because it couldn't handle people's baggage. Welcome to the Church. Our "baggage handling" system doesn't work very well either and needs to be fixed.

One of my favorite Christian thinkers during my college days was Os Guinness. His book, ***The Dust of Death***, a critique on the collapse of western thought, was "required reading" among Christian college students during the 1970s (It is still an excellent read). Guinness studied under Dr. Francis Schaeffer at L'Abri and Schaeffer's thought resonates through much of Guinness' writings even today. In one of his most recent books, entitled ***The Long Journey Home***, Dr. Guinness discusses the three impediments to Christianity most often cited by unbelievers. The first impediment to faith among unbelievers is the problem of "theodicy" or the problem of pain, evil and suffering in the world. The second impediment cited is the problem of the historical Jesus in light of such things as *The Jesus Project* (which questions the historical veracity of the biblical accounts of Jesus' life). The third impediment to Christian faith cited by unbelievers is . . . "Christians." That's right. When it comes to evangelism and the gospel, we are often our own worst enemy. At least, that's how unbelievers often see us. Ouch! As Christians, it is often our "baggage" (religious, spiritual, emotional) that gets in the way of what it is God wants to do in us and through us.

## Module 7: Life In The Kingdom - Discovering What It Means To Live Along The River - Page 129

In light of this observation by an evangelical Christian scholar who has devoted most of his professional Christian career to the issue of Christian apologetics, it should come as no great surprise that at a house church conference I attended a few years ago one of the speakers remarked, "We don't start house churches with believers. They bring too much baggage." I was somewhat taken aback, but his point was an honest one (and one shared, apparently, by many unbelievers). At the present time much of the house church movement consists of a cast of people who have left the institutional church for one reason or another, and in the process they have brought with them all of their left over "bad habits." The resulting hodge-podge is an amalgamation of house fellowships still in the process of unpacking their church baggage (or disbanding because the same baggage which they were unable to deal with in traditional church has now poisoned their journey into house church and rendered them unable to walk in "shalom" (biblical health, unity and peace). When you listen to them they sound something like the following:

**"We're the Church of those who . . . (pick your favorite from the following or fill in one of your own):**

-  Don't let women speak in church (yeah, sure, that's always a church-builder!);
-  Think the institutional church is mystery Babylon (so did Martin Luther 400 years ago, so what's new?);
-  Are faithfully studying prophecy & waiting for the rebuilt temple & the Rapture (although we're not really sure which comes first, or why, or when, but we're waiting . . . and studying . . . endlessly studying); great, let's get together and argue over the meaning of the 7<sup>th</sup> seal. That's always a church builder!
-  Don't believe in paid ministers (yep, and you'll get exactly what you paid for);
-  Will start actually doing house church once we get a proper theology of house church nailed down (right, like that'll ever happen!).

Com' on, let's get real. Life (both inside and outside of the church) is a process of accumulating baggage. The problem within the Kingdom of God is that *you can't swim in God's River while clutching on to needless baggage!* "Apostolic Conversion" (even in the life of an existing believer) is God's way of causing us to shed that baggage and to learn how to "travel light" on this journey into God's Kingdom plans and purposes. Physical baggage is often a metaphor for spiritual baggage. In Matthew 10:9-10 Jesus instructed the disciples about shedding baggage and "traveling light." Listen to what he said: "Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, 10 or a bag for your journey, or even two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support." Just as Jesus instructed the disciples to "travel light" by shedding physical baggage, so too we need to help one another shed religious, spiritual and emotional baggage with will "slow us down" (you can't swim in God's River while clutching it) from what God is calling us to do.

### **Baggage Check and Building Community**

Our ability to successfully deal with "baggage" will depend in no small part to our individual commitment to being part of what I call "genuine community" (I would relate this to Module 4 and DNA Marker #1 - *Persevering in fellowship or "koinonia"*). In genuine community (*koinonia*) "baggage happens" and this can result in initial conflict. But mature believers look past the conflict and work together to "bear one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2) and help each other unpack that baggage. Unfortunately this is a new experience for many people who have only experienced the "pseudo-community" of many traditional churches. In his book "**The Different Drum**" Dr. M. Scott Peck describes pseudo-community this way: "The essential dynamic of pseudo-community is conflict avoidance. The absence of conflict in a group is not by itself diagnostic. Genuine community may experience lovely and sometimes lengthy periods free from conflict. But that is because they have learned how to deal with conflict rather than avoid it. Pseudo-community is conflict-avoiding; true community is conflict resolving."<sup>76</sup> Genuine community requires intimacy, vulnerability and conflict resolution with both God and men. If we are to successfully help people unpack their baggage then we must pursue genuine community in our house churches and create a "safe place" where it can take place.

**Baggage Check # 1: Shedding Spiritual/Religious Baggage.** People (both Christians and un-believers) can come to their house church experience with spiritual or religious baggage. We need to realize that this is nothing new. It is a timeless phenomenon. Religious/Spiritual baggage created a crisis in the first-century church during the transition period leading up to Acts 15 (the Jerusalem Council). In the transition from institutional Jewish-based Christianity to the Gentile missions-oriented Church of Antioch (this "transition" began in earnest in Acts 10 with Cornelius and culminated in the crisis of Acts 15) the early church was forced to deal with (and shed) a great deal of religious baggage left over from its Jewish

---

<sup>76</sup>M. Scott Peck, **The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace**, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York: Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, 1998) p. 88

## A Kingdom, A People & A River - Page 130

roots. That included shedding the 5,000 (or so) quasi-laws, called "traditions of the elders," which had been created over many centuries by the religious establishment as a hedge around the 613 Mosaic laws of the Old Testament. The net result was a great deal of "religious baggage" that the early church was forced to confront and to shed. This included confronting religious "Judaizers" who taught that Gentile believers had to be circumcised and keep the "Law of Moses" in order to be truly saved and spiritual. The expansion of the church to the Gentiles (who neither understood nor cared about the religious baggage of Judaism) forced the early believers to re-think their understanding of "faith and practice" in order to avoid *"placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear"*(Acts 15:10).

Later, during his missionary journeys, the Apostle Paul found it necessary to confront more baggage that was being brought into the house churches that he had planted. Paul wrote to the house churches of Colossae (see Colossians 2:16-18) not to allow baggage regarding "food" (probably Jewish dietary laws), "a festival or a new moon (probably referring to the observance of O.T. Jewish feasts), or "a Sabbath day" (Christianity no longer observed the Jewish Sabbath as required under the O. T. Law), or "angels" or "visions." Baggage comes in many forms. To the house churches of Galatia Paul wrote in strong terms about the need to reject the baggage of Jewish legalism that many believers there were attempting to impose upon the Christian community. And to his spiritual son, Timothy, Paul gave pastoral instructions on dealing with baggage brought by false teachers including "myths," "genealogies," "mere speculations" and "fruitless discussions."

*"The Kingdom of God in your home"* isn't about your view of women in ministry, the end-times, Pentecostal manifestations, recovering the Old Testament feasts or anything else. Home based *ekklesia* in your house isn't even about evangelism (whoa, that'll goad somebody's ox). House Church is about a Kingdom, a people and a River. It's about Jesus and the Kingdom of God. House church is about experiencing the living Jesus in His resurrection power and presence as a manifestation of the Kingdom of God in your home. Home based *ekklesia* is God's basic "corporate" expression of the Kingdom of God. As a miniature expression of the greater Kingdom, it is to be a place where the River of His Spirit flows, where His Presence dwells and where both believers and seekers can touch and taste the Powers of the Age and can "taste and see that the Lord is Good." Ask yourself a question. What do you want people who visit your house church to remember when they leave? Do you want them to leave saying to themselves *"I've tasted and seen God's power and goodness"* or *"Gee, what did you think about his idea that Prince Charles could be the anti-Christ"*? House church is about helping both believers and unbeliever to discover that *"there is a River, the streams whereof make glad the city of God."* Everything else is religious baggage and window dressing.

**Baggage Check # 2: Shedding Emotional Baggage.** Many existing believers (and yes, may unbelievers) have been poorly treated and wounded at the hands of other believers, usually within the context of the traditional institutional church. The resulting "emotional baggage" can include anger, un-healed woundedness, fear of controlling & manipulative spiritual authority, and much more. This type of emotional baggage can manifest itself in a variety of ways. Emotionally wounded people tend to be wary of getting too close to other or of making commitments to groups, hence they tend to be "loners." Wounded apostles tend to go into business or professional work where they can apply their ability to see and implement strategies to business & secular work. Wounded prophets tend to become solitary prophetic figures (*"I'm God's battle axe and He's called me to war against the principalities in this area."* This person visited one of our house church meetings.) who eventually end up either alone or meeting with other wounded prophetic types, spending their time engaging in "prophetic tail chasing" by prophesying to each other and calling it "prophetic ministry." Since such people have often suffered at the hands of controlling authority figures in churches (*"We don't need or allow that kind of false prophetic ministry in our church"*) they are naturally wary of partnering with other 5-fold gifts out of fear of some trying to control (i.e., quench) them and their gift.

Like I said, baggage can come in many forms and nearly everybody has some. It isn't anything new. But in our house churches today, as in the house churches of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, we need to be self-aware of what baggage we are carrying around, and we need to be able to lovingly help others see their baggage too. So, take some time for healthy reflection. Do a personal "baggage check." What Christian baggage are you carrying around, and are you willing to leave it at the door as you enter house church. If not, your house church experience will probably not be a pleasant one and will probably not last very long, because, as airport officials in Denver discovered, baggage that cannot be handled and properly disposed of will cause the whole operation to eventually shut down.

### O.K. Let's Apply This

⇒ **Post Modern Application:** Post Moderns are looking to experience authentic relationships and genuine community where people help each other "unpack" the baggage we have brought in, and to do this in a manner that resolves conflicts without being harsh or judgmental. It is important to create a "safe" environment as an extended family where people can authentically deal with their baggage without feeling judged, condemned or ostracized.

I believe that baggage, whether religious, spiritual or emotional, needs three things:

- ⇒ **Death.** People carrying around this kind of emotional baggage need to experience a profound and biblical "death-to-self." Some people have been so wounded for so long and have been carrying around their baggage for so long that it has become a part of who they are. Their wounds and their baggage ARE their identity. Only a profound spiritual death, to self and their baggage, can set them free. Dead people have no baggage. So, are you (am I) prepared and willing to die to ourselves and our baggage in a profound manner that everyone can see? Is your pride and personal religious baggage worth stumbling over? Is it worth causing others to stumble? Would you be willing to allow God to "set fire" to your baggage and humble your pride in order to build His Kingdom? Are you willing to die-to-self so that others might live as a result of your obedience? At this point, let me encourage you to go back to **Module 1** and come to terms with **Wolfgang Simson's "5 Steps of Apostolic Migration."** Many existing believers presently "experimenting" with house church still need to go through the Wilderness experience of **Point 0** where God intends for them to experience this profound and biblical death. They are not really ready yet to move to **Point +1** and cross over into house church.
- ⇒ **Healing.** Thankfully, God desires more than simply our death. He desires our healing, "*He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds.*" (Psalm 147:3) Once we have died to ourselves and our baggage God can begin the genuine process of healing us and restoring us to our proper fullness and place in His Kingdom purposes.
- ⇒ **Partnering.** People with baggage need to partner with other people to help them see and shed such baggage when it arises. We will discuss this more when we discuss "*The Role of Leadership & Mending One Another's Nets.*"



Let the River flow . . . and wash away your baggage. Remember, you can't swim in God's River while holding on to it!

### When and Where Should We Meet?

I recently read an article about Christians in China. The article described how, at the end of a busy workday, a group of 30 believers met on one of the highest floors of a Beijing office tower. The location of the meeting was a secret until that very day with the time and place being confirmed with brief cell phone calls and exchanged passwords to protect privacy. As rush traffic filled the streets below this group of 30 working professionals began to pray and worship God clandestinely. Welcome to the underground house church, Chinese style. Here are believers who are simply thankful to be able to meet. They don't spend a lot of time quibbling about the time, place and day.

I grew up in the American South where, throughout my youth, there were "Blue Laws." A "Blue Law" meant that on Sundays all commercial establishments, from grocery stores to gas stations, were closed and most people went to Church (and the ones who didn't go always knew that they should have gone!). My how things have changed. When it comes to the times and places of our house church meetings today you and I have the luxury of freedom of choice. House church can take place literally any where on any day and at any time. We actually see this occurring in the Book of Acts in the early church. There we learn that the early church met "**day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house . . .**" (See Acts 2:46). Gone is the notion that we must go to a holy place on a holy day to hear a holy person lecture on holy things. When and where your house church meets is up to you and those in your group. It could meet during the week, or, yes, even on Sunday.<sup>77</sup> It may meet in one fixed location or you may choose to move around "*from house to house*" as the early Church did. So choose a time and a place, make certain that everyone in your group knows about it, and then "**Just Do It!**"



### O.K. Let's Apply This

---

<sup>77</sup>"Sabbatarians" or people who believe that Church must take place on the "Sabbath" have a problem with this issue of meeting anytime. I offer several responses. **First**, the early church didn't worship on the Sabbath (the seventh day of the week, or our Saturday) but met on the first day of the week, thereby acknowledging that the death and resurrection of Jesus had altered the "times and seasons". **Second**, the Council of Elders in Acts 15 which considered whether Gentiles needed to keep "the Law of Moses" apparently did not see Sabbath observance as necessary. **Third**, Paul, writing to the predominantly Gentile church at Colossae told those Gentile believers not to allow anyone to "*act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day, things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.*" (Colossians 2:16-17). This admonition would only make sense if Jewish legalists were attempting to impose Sabbath-keeping on Gentile believers as something necessary for their faith and obedience. **Fourth**, if Christians are obligated to "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," then they are also obligated to keep the other 612 requirements of "The Law of Moses." We don't get to pick and choose which ones we will keep and which we won't. Or have you not read the book of Galatians?

## A Kingdom, A People & A River - Page 132

- ⇒ **Post Modern Application:** Post Moderns believe in “participation.” There are several ways this can happen. Everyone should participate in the decision of when and where to meet. It could also mean that the house church decides to meet in different homes so that everyone has the opportunity to host the gathering. They might even decide to meet in an alternative location such as a restaurant or a Starbucks (been there, done that!).
- ⇒ Pick a day that is best for most people in your house church. It may be a Monday night, a Wednesday night, a Saturday morning, a Sunday evening, etc. Set a time, make it known and work at being consistent (yep, back to that ol’ perseverance thing again). Make sure you allow enough time. Our meetings usually take around three hours (a little longer if we’re doing a potluck).



*Let the River flow . . . and don't limit it to a holy day or a particular place!*

### Tossed Salad Christianity - Mixing It Up Over A Meal

In case you missed it, Christianity began over a meal. It was a Passover meal that Jesus earnestly longed to share with His disciples. We have romanticized it by painting it on frescoes and by labeling it “The Last Supper,” but make no mistake, it was a meal shared between Jesus and His disciples. As we discovered in Module 4 under *DNA Marker # 6: Sharing Meals Together*, the disciples had learned directly from Jesus Himself regarding the importance of sharing meals with people. Jesus was a frequent dinner guest in the homes of people He was seeking to reach, so much so that it became a “scandal” to the religious people of His day: *“And as Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man, called Matthew, sitting in the tax office; and He said to him, “Follow Me!” And he rose, and followed Him. And it happened that as He was reclining at the table in the house, behold many tax-gatherers and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, “Why is your Teacher eating with the tax-gatherers and sinners?” But when He heard this, He said, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. “But go and learn what this means, ‘I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”* (Matthew 9:9-13; see also Mark 2:16 and Luke 5:30). Wolfgang Simson told a house church conference audience that Jesus really only did three things: He ate with people, told stories about the Kingdom of God, and cast out people’s demons. The early church followed this example. They regularly shared meals together. It had become part of their DNA. The early church loved taking meals together in one another’s houses. I think it was because it reminded many of them of the many meals they had shared with Jesus while He was on earth. These meals became common in the early Church and came to be known as the Agape or Love feast. By the time Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth (a network of between half-dozen and a dozen house churches that met in Corinth) problems had arisen with these love feasts and Paul wrote to correct those problems (see 1 Corinthians 11:17ff), but the feasts themselves were an integral part of house church life for the first several centuries of the Church. And it was during such a meal that the Lord’s Supper was normally celebrated, just as it was that first time between Jesus and His disciples.

Meals can be great social occasions where people can let down their guard and get to know others. It can help to put new people at ease. During the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther would entertain his students over dinner and engage in significant theological discussion over the meal.<sup>78</sup> I encourage all of our house churches to begin a practice of sharing a meal together as part of their meeting (what Wolfgang Simson calls a “meating”). This can be a potluck where everyone brings something, thereby not placing the burden for preparing the meal on one person, or your group may agree to host meals at various homes. Then, at some point in the meal the Lord’s Supper can be observed. I usually have bread and juice prepared and I like to read Paul’s words from 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. We then dip our bread in a common cup of juice and partake together. Sometimes we end the Lord’s Supper by singing the doxology or another appropriate song or hymn. There is no “right” or “wrong” way to do this, although Christians coming out of more liturgical backgrounds (remember our discussion of “baggage”) may take a while to adjust to this freedom of worship.



#### O.K. Let’s Apply This

- ⇒ **Post Modern Application:** From a Post Modern perspective sharing a meal together is experiential, participatory, relational and community building! It is also an important aspect of what it means to function as an extended family. Families eat meals together.
- ⇒ Plan a potluck as part of the *ekklesia* meeting in your home.

---

<sup>78</sup>Luther, Martin. *Tabletalk: Luther’s Comments on Life, the Church and the Bible*. \_\_\_\_: Christian Focus Publications, 2003.

- Make sure that everyone who wants to has the opportunity to participate and bring something.
- During the potluck, talk about what God is doing in your life. (Answered prayers, something God showed you from the Word, a significant dream you recently had, etc.). If you are inviting unbelievers consider holding a BBQ and do your best to avoid “religious” discussions.
- At some point in the potluck, celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Have juice and bread available. Read Paul’s words to the house churches in Corinth found in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.
- For a variety, like any family, we sometimes just order out for pizza for our Monday night house church meeting!



*Let the River flow . . . and let Him teach you how to have fellowship over dinner with Himself and with each other!*

### Leadership: Who’s In Charge Here Anyway?

Here is the simple biblical answer: The Holy Spirit should be in charge, or there is something wrong! But on a human level we always want to know who is leading the meeting. When we look at the Book of Acts, many New Testament Churches got started and initially functioned without designated or appointed leadership. That came later. And even when leaders were appointed by Paul (see Acts 14:23) all of those leaders were converts from either paganism or Judaism with little or no training or experience in “what it takes” to lead a church. In short, they learned by doing and corrected their “mistakes” along the way. There were no books on pastoral care and biblical leadership. There were no Bible college or seminary graduates, no ordained or credentialed clergy, no professional staff. But God called out and raised up leaders. It was all “on the job” training among believers who probably had far less Biblical knowledge and experience than you or I have today. If God could use them, He can use you! If they could do it, so can you!

### Seven Biblical Leadership Callings

*“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, ‘When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men’ . . . . And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”(Ephesians 4:7-16)*

I believe that Scripture describes seven (7) leadership callings (I want to avoid referring to these as “offices” because they are really callings and job descriptions). They consist of “the 5-fold ministry” of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, along with elders and deacons. Every house church, if it is an “extended family,” has a father or mother figure of experience and wisdom who leads it. We call these “elders.” There are also God-appointed itinerant ministers who service a network, a city or a region. These are the 5-fold ministry gifts.<sup>79</sup> In Acts 15 the Apostles & elders came together to form an Apostolic Council to solve problems, make decisions and set policy. These seven callings are intended by God to function as a leadership team, each with a unique role, to oversee and encourage the health and growth of the body. Over time, as your group matures and grows God will call out and raise up people to function in all of these areas:

- Apostles & Prophets** - I am treating these two together because they share a unique calling to provide the “foundation” for planting and building up of Churches. This is what Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:20: *“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”* (Ephesians 2:19-22). This does not mean that a house church cannot be planted without apostles and prophets (although some people teach this) but that they have a unique calling to work together in the establishment of new works. Prophets are uniquely called and gifted to hear from God regarding His heart and purposes for people and

---

<sup>79</sup>For more on the 5-Fold ministry see our article in Appendix A entitled “Of Servants, Fools & Kings: Two Competing Views of 5-Fold Ministry”.

## A Kingdom, A People & A River - Page 134

for areas. Prophets team with Apostles because Apostles are uniquely called and gifted to translate God's prophetic voice into practical strategies for accomplishing what the prophets are hearing. Without Apostles Prophets become "prophetic junkies" who end up "chasing their prophetic tails" with no way to implement what they are hearing. This leads to frustration, prophecies without a purpose and prophetic conferences where frustrated prophets gather to prophesy to one another and call it ministry. Without Prophets, Apostles become builders of "Apostolic empires," seeking to implement grand strategies with no prophetic direction for what God is seeking to accomplish. Together, Prophets hear God's heart for people and places while Apostles translate those visions into strategies for planting house church networks to reach those people and places. Apostles see far and understand implications. Prophets hear clearly and have insight into God's heart. Apostles are about strategy and architecture. Prophets are about vision and "adrenaline."

- ❑ **Teachers** - In 1 Corinthians 12:28 the Apostle Paul gives an order of giftings which place Apostles first, Prophets second and Teachers third. That is the order being followed here. Prophets have spiritual insight into God's heart. Apostles have strategies for accomplishing God's purpose. Teachers look for understanding by digging deep into God's word in order to explain God's plan as He reveals it to the Apostles & Prophets. The role of the teacher is not to "balance" the apostolic or prophetic, but to explain and expound on the biblical basis for what God is saying through the apostles and prophets. Teachers do not lay foundations (a task given to Apostles and Prophets) but can explain foundations brilliantly! They are the explainers and apologists of the body. If a church is built around a gifted teacher (as may churches today are) people will end up with notebooks full of great notes and insights, but with no sense of God's prophetic heart for His people or His Apostolic strategies for accomplishing His Kingdom purposes.
- ❑ **Evangelists** - Evangelists are the gatherers of stray sheep. In the book of Acts Philip of Caesarea was known as "Philip the Evangelist" (Acts 21:8). Their passion is to bring in large numbers of sheep. Therefore, they are all about encouraging the church to turn outward in its thinking. They want to see as many people brought into and involved with the church as possible. Evangelists live on adrenaline and activity. A church built on or by an evangelist will be a hub of non-stop activity and programs. It will be very wide, but very shallow, with virtually every message being a salvation message with little depth or discipleship.
- ❑ **Pastors** - The English word "pastor" is actually the Greek word *poimen* or "shepherd." Pastors are shepherds, people who simply love sheep. Pastors are relational people who want to spend time with the sheep. For them, ministry is all about meeting the needs of the sheep. Pastors are the networkers of the body, the counselors of the wounded and needy, the team builders who bring the body together, and the family founders who want to see the body function together as an extended family. But if a church is left in the hands of pastors it will become a *need driven* (as opposed to God-vision driven) counseling and rehab ministry, a spiritual hospital for the wounded that will soon be overwhelmed by endless needs.
- ❑ **Elders** - Every extended family has a father or mother figure who lead the extended family. The same should be true of the house church family. Generally speaking, elders (as the Greek term *presbuteros* suggests) are people of age, wisdom and maturity who know and understand the needs of their particular house church families. (See 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and 1 Peter 5:1-4). Their biblical responsibilities are essentially two, summed up by two Greek words. First, they are "overseers" (Greek: *episkopos* or "overseer"). They are to oversee the life, the functioning and the administration of the house church. Second, they are "shepherds" (again, *poimen*) whose responsibility it is to "feed and tend" the flock (A house church "shepherd" tends his own house church flock. A 5-fold shepherd tends several house churches). Finally, elders are not given authority to (indeed, they are prohibited from) "lord" it over those they serve (1 Peter 5:3). Elders are to be mentors, examples of Christ-likeness to those they serve. They also work with the Apostles to solve problems and set policy for the house churches.
- ❑ **Deacons** - These are the people of service and compassion, and the organizers & need assessors of the body. The functioning of deacons is first seen in Acts 6:1-6. In addition to being spirit filled men of wisdom and good reputation, their role is to identify and know the needs of the house church and to communicate those needs to the rest of the leadership. They are the uniquely and powerfully gifted servants of the body who work closely with the Apostles & elders to see that the physical needs of the body are met (Acts 6:1-4).

The New Testament pattern suggests that it was primarily men who served as elders, while both men and women served as deacons. But his pattern was **not** absolute or exclusive. Paul acknowledged Aquilla and Priscilla as his "co-workers" or "fellow-laborers" in the Lord (see Romans 16:3). We also know that Phoebe was a deaconess, and it is clear from 1 Timothy 3 that the qualifications for both elders and deacons are virtually identical (including the requirement that both be the "husband of one wife," suggesting that the issue is not gender but marital fidelity). In Romans 16:7 Paul says, "Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me." Paul here identifies two additional "apostles," both of whom preceded him in the faith. And Junia was

apparently a woman.<sup>80</sup> Gender is not an obstacle to house church leadership! I believe it is biblical to say that if you are qualified to lead a family, then you are probably qualified to lead a house church. I believe that the New Testament provides broad parameters for leadership that are inclusive, unless there is a specific disqualification. In other words, God desires that you be a leader in the Church that meets in your house unless there is a specific reason why you should not (i.e., a specific unrepented violation of the leadership qualities found in 1 Timothy 3:1-13).

How leadership expresses itself in your house church will vary, within the guidelines provided by Scripture. I know of house churches where each meeting is “facilitated” by a different person or family, and others where there are recognized elders. But remember, generally speaking, the New Testament pattern is that house churches get started and then produce leaders, not the other way around. For now, be the Church of Nike: **Just Do It!** And allow God to begin His work in your midst.

### ***The Role of Leadership & Mending One Another’s Nets***

To identify and define a leadership calling is not the same thing as understanding the practical role or functioning of a leader. And spiritual gifts and callings are often best identified and recognized by watching what people do and how they respond in various ministry settings. So, what is the practical role of a leader in house church? In 1 Peter 5:1-5 the Apostle Peter gives instructions regarding leadership in the church. In verse 3 he says, “*nor yet as lording it over those allotted to you charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.*” The last time I heard a church pastor preach on this passage he proceeded, in the months following that sermon, to institute a heavy handed “shepherding” program which resulted in the leadership “lording” it over the flock, wounding scores of believers and splitting one of the oldest and largest evangelical churches in our city.

So, what is the practical role of leadership in house church? I found the answer to that question in the Greek word *katartidzo*. This powerful Greek word means “*to render (something) fit,*” hence to render something “*complete.*” In classical Greek it was used to describe the setting or mending of broken bones and of restoring someone to their right mind. As we will soon see, it is used in the gospels to describe fishermen “mending” their nets (i.e., rendering them once again complete and fit for fishing). I observed earlier that the physical is often a metaphor for the spiritual. I believe this is true here. Let’s face reality. Life is a process which “shreds” our nets and sometimes gets them so tangled up that we can barely function. And like good fishermen, we need a time and a place to sit with other fishermen and “mend our nets.” Based on this biblical metaphor, I want to suggest that the proper and primary role of all leaders in the home based *ekklesia* which God is building is to serve one another by helping each other “mend our nets.” I believe an examination of several biblical passages will reveal several important leadership principles which will demonstrate my understanding of the role of leaders.

⇒ **Scripture:** *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.* (Ephesians 4:11-13)

□ **Observation:** God gave the five-fold ministry gifts to the church **for** (a word which implies purpose) the “equipping” of the saints for the work of service. The Greek word translated “equipping” is *katartidzo*.

□ **Principle:** ***If we as leaders are not helping others to mend their nets and restore order in their lives, we are not fulfilling our calling.***

⇒ **Scripture:** *“And going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. And they immediately left the boat and their father, and followed Him.”* (Matthew 4:21-22)

⇒ **Scripture:** *“And going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. And immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.”* (Mark 1:19-20)

□ **Observation:** There are many observations we could make regarding these passages, including the fact that the mending of nets here was a collective (team) effort which involved *everyone* in a common task. But

---

<sup>80</sup>See Dr. James Edwards, **Romans**, New International Biblical Commentary Series, Vol. 6 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992). “Depending on the Greek accenting of *Iouinia* (a form of the name which unfortunately obscures its gender), the name could be either male (*Junias*) or female (*Junia*). The name is normally presumed male, but a recent study reveals over 250 examples of it in Greek literature, not one of which is masculine! This seems to be nearly incontrovertible evidence that the name is feminine . . .” Page 355.

## A Kingdom, A People & A River - Page 136

we shouldn't miss the *importance* of the task. Without proper mending of broken nets, the task of fishing ground to a halt. The proper mending of the nets of our lives in house church must occur if the task of the church in bringing the Kingdom of God to the world is to go on.

❑ **Principle:** *It's impossible to fish with broken nets.*

⇒ **Scripture:** *"Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you **be made complete** in the same mind and in the same judgment." (1 Corinthians 1:10)*

❑ **Observation:** This is a passage about unity in the church. There is much talk today about "unity" among believers, but no apparent understanding that "unity" begins in the local house church. Paul's solution to "divisions" in the church is *"to be mended"* together. Nothing heals divisions and builds unity better than the body and its leaders coming together in the common task of mending one another's nets.

❑ **Principle:** *When house churches and their leaders mend nets together as a team the result is unity.*

⇒ **Scripture:** *"Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, **restore** such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted." (Galatians 6:1)*

❑ **Observation:** What I notice here is that the emphasis of this passage is not upon the trespass, but upon the importance of manifesting a spirit of gentleness (i.e., humility) in the process of restoration (*katartidzo*). People are going to be *"overtaken before one has the opportunity to flee"* (the meaning of the word) by a lapse, error or transgression. The call of biblical leadership is to manifest a spirit of humility as we restore that person by helping them to mend their broken net.

❑ **Principle:** *Helping someone else mend their broken net requires humility on our part.*

⇒ **Scripture:** *"For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and **may complete** what is lacking in your faith?" (1 Thessalonians 3:9-10)*

❑ **Observation:** Paul understood that "net mending" was a team activity, and he longed to be with the believers in Thessalonica so that he could have a part in making them "complete" helping them mend their nets. Paul understood that we all need the ministry of people with other gifts and callings in our lives in order for our faith to be made complete.

❑ **Principle:** *We need the ministry of others in our lives to mend our nets and to make up what is lacking in our faith.*

⇒ **Scripture:** *"Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, **equip** you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen." (Hebrews 13:20-21)*

⇒ **Scripture:** *"And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself **perfect**, confirm, strengthen and establish you." (1 Peter 5:10)*

❑ **Observation:** Both the author of Hebrews and the Apostle Peter saw the same principle at work in the body of Christ. They both saw that, ultimately, it is God - through Jesus - Who is the one mending our nets to equip and perfect us. God uses all of the ministry and leadership gifts together to accomplish His purpose of mending our nets and equipping us for ministry in His Kingdom.

❑ **Principle:** *Ultimately, it is God Himself Who mends our nets, but He usually does it through His appointed & gifted people.*

### **When You Assemble: The Importance of Mutual Ministry**

No discussion of gifts, leadership and net mending in the life of the New Testament home based *ekklesia* would be complete with some observations regarding the role and importance of "mutual ministry" in the life of the Church when we gather

together. Someone once described professional football as 22 men in desperate need of rest being watched by 50,000 spectators in desperate need of exercise. Sound familiar? It is estimated that in the traditional church 20% of the people do 80% of the work (with such a lopsided work load, the miracle is that anything gets done!). In many respects contemporary traditional churches have adopted this passive entertainment model for worship. A few professional people perform on Sunday morning and everyone else “enters in vicariously” and “cheers” them on, but they never really participate. It is passive, spectator-oriented Christianity, and it is destroying the church.

As we have already seen under the discussion of mending one another’s nets, the model of the early New Testament Church is quite different. In the New Testament house church everyone participated, *“When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation”* (1Corinthians 14:26). In this setting each person has the opportunity to share what God has laid upon their heart, to share a Scripture, to share a word of encouragement. Paul’s entire argument in 1 Corinthians 12-14 is that 1) God gives spiritual gifts to every person in the body of Christ (Chapter 12:1-11), 2) no gift is unnecessary and all are important to the proper functioning of the body (12:12-31), 3) Love is the required element that enables the body to exercise those gifts in a way that builds the body up and does not tear it down (Chapter 13), and 4) each of us is to exercise our unique gift clearly and in an orderly manner so that the entire body is edified (Greek: *oikodomeo* - “to build up”), literally “built up” like a house being built piece by piece, each of us contributing our unique piece to the overall building).

This is what we call “mutual ministry.” It is not one active person ministering to many passive people. It is every person contributing the unique thing God has given him or her. Eventually, gifted teachers will be recognized for their unique ability to teach the things of God with clarity, intercessors will be identified for their commitment to private and public intercession, those with gifts of healing will be seen by their calling to effectually pray for those in need, etc.

We see this concept of active mutual ministry reflected in Hebrews 10:23-25, *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.”*

The word “consider” comes from the Greek *katanoeo* (*noeo* = to think + *kata* = an intensifier) which means *“To think deeply about, consider, contemplate, observe.”* Jesus used the same word when he said, *“Consider the ravens...consider the lilies.”* (Lk. 12:24-27). The idea here is that active mutual ministry means we must *“prepare with prayer”* before we meet. The Greek sentence really says *“Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.”* Part of our preparation for house church is that we are constantly observing and thinking deeply about the others in our fellowship in order to be able to effectively *stimulate one another to love and good deeds*. Each person in your fellowship is unique. What stimulates one person to greater Christlikeness may not work for another. Each of us is called upon to “think deeply” about one another. The word “stimulate” comes from a root word that means *“to make sharp”* as with a sword. It means *“to stir up, incite, provoke, motivate.”* Again, as every parent and every coach knows, what motivates one person will not motivate another. It requires thoughtful preparation on our part.

The challenge of mutual ministry is that each believer must be spending individual time alone with God during the week, reading the Scriptures, praying (for ourselves and for each other) and listening to hear God’s voice, so that when the house church assembles he (or she) has something to bring that is the result of their on-going walk with God. Then, as your house church assembles and begins to worship take time to seek the face of God in prayer, waiting to see if He has something to say to the waiting Church. Don’t fear the silence of God’s Presence (by trying to fill it with “prayer verbiage”), but use it as an opportunity to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. Then, step out in faith to pray for one another, to prophesy over one another, to share words of encouragement with one another, to share a psalm, a hymn or a spiritual song. Be willing to “take a risk” that God is actually moving among His Church.

### ***Guarding Against False Teachings Regarding Authority & Leadership In The Church***

Many people have been deeply wounded by authority figures in organized churches. This has happened through such things as the “shepherding” movement of the 1980s and the “Spiritual Covering” movement (the “shepherding” movement under new guise) of today. I personally have a growing list of people who have been told that they are in sin and under a curse because they have left someone’s “umbrella of spiritual authority and covering.” (And that is absolute biblical nonsense!). The result has been a great deal of fear and mistrust of “spiritual leadership” in the church. For this reason (and because these false teachings, such as the current teaching regarding “covering,” keep circulating) I have written an article entitled ***“Spiritual Power, Authority & Covering In The Church”*** and have included it in Appendix A of this workbook. If you have issues or concerns on this topic of authority in the church (more particularly in the House Church) I would encourage you to read that article, as it represents our teaching and practice.



**O.K. Let’s Apply This**

## A Kingdom, A People & A River - Page 138

- ⇒ **Post Modern Application:** Remember, Post Moderns are acutely suspicious of authority figures and institutions, and that includes religious authority figures and religious institutions or organizations. This is why the New Testament model of leadership by example and service is so crucial.

So, exactly how does all this work? It's really sort of simple and should unfold "naturally" (or "supernaturally" as your house church gathering proceeds.

- ⇒ Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to cause His gifts (including the leadership gifts) to "float to the surface" as your house church ministers to one another and grows together. Gifts are best identified by their exercise, and that requires some time and practice. And God's anointed leaders are best identified by the gifts they exercise in the body over time.
- ⇒ Turn one of your house church evenings into a "Mending Nets" evening where the sole "agenda" is to come together as a house church family to pray, worship God, invite the Holy Spirit to ignite all of His gifts, and to spend the evening praying for one another and helping each other "mend nets."
- ⇒ After the meal (assuming a potluck here!), gather to worship and pray.
  - ❑ Consider sharing with the group some of the Mending Nets Scriptures & Principles in this section;
  - ❑ Have worship CDs with worship songs that are familiar and easy to sing;
  - ❑ As you worship, encourage everyone to wait on God, invite the Holy Spirit to come and anoint all of His gifts in the body, and listen for His voice of encouragement and direction in the meeting. Silence before the Lord is a good thing. Learn to pray and wait on God. Ask people for their needs ("where are your nets broken tonight") and then take the initiative by asking several people to help you pray for that person. Ask others what they are hearing and seeing from the Lord for that person.
  - ❑ Don't expect (or demand) that every person will participate every time. The goal is to create an atmosphere where everyone feels the freedom to participate as God leads and to see that the "success" of the house church meeting does not come to depend upon the "performance" of a single gifted person.
  - ❑ Give people the freedom to "fail" and make "mistakes." They will, so get over it. Remember, God sovereignly placed 1 Corinthians 13 in the middle of two chapters of instructions concerning mutual ministry and exercising spiritual gifts in a house church meeting! So, step out in obedience and then **LOVE EACH OTHER!**



*Let the River flow . . . and allow Him to release all of His gifts and raise up His anointed leaders!*

### That's Almost Music!: Worship and Music in House Church

My wife and I were privileged to attend one of the last conferences conducted by John Wimber, founder of the Association of Vineyard Churches, before he went home to be with the Lord. Before his conversion to Christ John had been a professional musician and the manager of "The Righteous Brothers." John never lost his passion for music and the Vineyard movement became a pioneer in the area of contemporary Christian worship music. At this particular conference the session began with a time of singing and worship led by a worship band that, well, still needed some work. At the end, as the band was putting away its instruments and John was taking his place behind the podium, preparing to speak, he turned to the band members and said, *"Thanks fellows, that was almost music."* I laughed so hard I thought I would split a seam! John had summed up the essence of the moment, and had unknowingly highlighted a problem in the contemporary Church. We are no longer satisfied with "almost music."






In many ways the contemporary church has become spoiled with regards to music. I came to Christ at the tail-end of "the Jesus Movement" in the early 1970s. I remember when your choice of Christian music consisted of traditional hymns, "gospel" music (usually with a Nashville-country flair) or that new "radical" music coming out of Christian hippies like Maranatha Music or strange characters like Larry Norman (remember, *"Just Visiting This Planet"* and *"I Wish We'd All Been Ready"*?). A lot has changed. One of the things that has changed is that Christians today are much more accustomed to professionally orchestrated praise & worship music that leaves the average believer intimidated about any attempt to simply *"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord."* When a Franklin Graham Festival recently visited our city the choir director was

## Module 7: Life In The Kingdom - Discovering What It Means To Live Along The River - Page 139

approached with an unusual request. A young lady wanted to sing in the choir. The only problem was that she had recently had major throat surgery and couldn't speak or sing above a whisper. When the choir director asked her how she would sing she wrote out a simple response, "You don't understand. I sing with my heart." They invited her to sing in the choir.

The people of God have always been a singing people. The Psalms of David were originally sung, and on occasion it was the worship choir that led the way into battle (see 2 Chronicles 20:21ff). Jesus sang hymns with his disciples at the last supper (see Matt. 26:30 & Mark 14:26), and, as Governor Pliny described to the Emperor Trajan, when the early church gathered together they would "sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god." During the dark times of the Middle Ages as Europe reeled under barbarian invasions the Church developed the Gregorian Chant as the disciplined music for difficult times. During the Reformation, reformers like Martin Luther wrote new songs to celebrate a new found faith, and the Gregorian Chant of the Medieval Church gave way to the strains of the Psalter and a rediscovery of the Psalms set to music. Times of revival have always produced new hymns and songs. During the Evangelical Awakening of the 1700s Charles Wesley, one of the most prolific of hymn writers with some 4,000 hymns to his credit, wrote new hymns for specific Methodist congregations to encourage them during dark times of persecution. During the Great Manhattan Prayer Revival of 1857-58, two prominent leaders of the revival at Jayne's Hall (in Philadelphia) were the Reverend Dudley Tyng, an Episcopal, and the Reverend George Duffield, a Presbyterian. In May of 1858 Dudley Tyng was mortally wounded in an accident. On his death-bed Tyng told his father to tell the men in Jayne's Hall "to stand up for Jesus." When Tyng's father related this story at his son's memorial service, George Duffield was so moved by the dying words of his friend that he went home and wrote the hymn we sing today, "Stand up, Stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross." The Welsh Revival of 1904 came to be known as "the singing revival" because of the prominent place given to corporate worship through the singing of great old Welsh hymns. Whether in times of crisis, times of revival, or times of regular worship, the people of God have always been a singing people. But historically their singing and worship was always related to their life-experience with God. The people of God worshiped through their music the same God whom they worshiped with their lives.

The issue of music and worship in the church has been complicated in today's Church by the rise in popularity of "contemporary Christian worship music" which has become a billion dollar industry. The popularity of "contemporary worship music" has confronted God's people with a new-old challenge, namely, to avoid developing a new "religious mind-set" regarding music and worship. Anyone, Christian or unbeliever, can go through the motions of singing contemporary worship songs (or traditional old hymns, or the "Psalter," etc.). But only a believer can genuinely worship God "in Spirit and in truth." The ability to sing without worshiping is the beginning of a "religious mind-set."

-  Worship becomes "religious" when it becomes "cheap," requiring no price or sacrifice on the part of the individual in order to participate;
-  Worship becomes "religious" when it becomes "easily reproducible," which happens because it is simply a human creation, rather than a divine event;
-  Worship becomes "religious" when it becomes the formula for causing God to step into our presence, rather than challenging us to step into God's presence;
-  Worship becomes "religious" when it begins to look like a replica of the priests of Baal, dancing around the altar, cutting themselves in order to "make God come down."
-  Worship becomes "religious" when we begin to "worship our worship" because it has become the "spiritual formula" for "finding God's presence" or getting God to "come down."

Music and worship in the house church can be a blessing, or it can be baggage. It depends on what we do with it. I have seen Christians argue and Churches split over the color of a new hymnal, or over which hymnal to use, or whether or not to use a hymnal versus song sheets. Some Christians dislike contemporary worship music ("I don't like the rhythm and they are theologically shallow") and prefer traditional hymns ("Good theology and the music doesn't drown out the words"), while other people will only sing from the Psalter Hymnal (the Psalms set to music, "after all they were good enough for David!" usually in minor keys just to assure that you don't enjoy them too much!). Well, you get the picture. These conflicts are often a manifestation of a "religious mind-set" which thinks it has found the "spiritual formula" for winging and finding God's presence.

O.K., lets shed our music baggage and start over. God is pleased with the music of our hearts. Your house church will eventually learn to worship together, and in the process they will discover what style of music meets the worship needs of those in your fellowship. Is there a musically inclined person who can play the piano or guitar to facilitate the music? If not, then you can do it acapella (without instruments) or you can purchase music tapes or CDs containing your favorites hymns or songs and learn to sing along. But be flexible and creative. Learn to appreciate the diversity of music and worship in the body of Christ (because not everyone is like you . . . or me!). Remember the biblical standard for music and worship: "Make

## A Kingdom, A People & A River - Page 140

a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth"! And you will never hear the Lord complain, "that was almost music"!

### O.K. Let's Apply This

- ⇒ **Post Modern Application:** Post Moderns are looking to participate in the worship experience of a worshipping community. We must become an extended family that enjoys worshipping together.
- ⇒ Consciously work to avoid developing a "religious mind-set" that looks to discover a worship "formula."
- ⇒ Work to recover a holistic view of worship by re-uniting the idea of worship with the living of a life of sacrificial obedience. In Genesis 22 God told Abraham to sacrifice his son (22:1-2). But Abraham told his servant that "I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you." (22:5). The required obedience which God described as a sacrifice Abraham described as worship. We need to model and teach the very biblical concept that a life of sacrificial obedience that personally costs us something is, itself, an act of worship before God.
- ⇒ Challenge your house church to come up with creative worship ideas that don't just involve singing songs. In one of our house church meetings a woman asked if she could to a worship dance the following week. I agreed. The next week she performed a wonderful dance to a worship CD and everyone was greatly blessed! Challenge your house church to find new expressions of worshipping God "in Spirit and in truth."
- ⇒ Engage in times of silent worship before God, interspersed with the spontaneous reading of Psalms and other Scriptures.



Let the River flow . . . and allow Him to empower you into authentic, sacrificial worship in Spirit and in truth.

### The Role of Teaching In House Church

Let me begin this section with a story from the Great Welsh Revival of 1904. This revival came to be called "the singing revival" because of the tremendous amount of worshipful singing that occurred at many of the meetings. Nearly every church in Wales was filled to capacity 7 nights a week for 18 months, and over 5% of the population of the nation professed Christ for the first time and joined a Church! But the revival was frequently criticized for a lack of Bible teaching & preaching. A well respected London Journalist (and Christian) named W. T. Stead traveled to Wales to personally witness the revival. His articles, which appeared in several Christian publications, popularized the revival in London. He was asked specifically about the lack of teaching & preaching in many of the services. Here is Mr. Stead's observation as it appeared in *The Methodist Times* for December 15, 1904:

*"Do you think that teaching is what people want in a revival? These people, all the people in a land like ours, are taught to death, preached to insensibility. They all know the essential truths. They know that they are not living as they ought to live, and no amount of teaching will add anything to that conviction. To hear some people talk you would imagine that the best way to get a sluggard out of bed is to send a tract on astronomy showing him that according to the fixed and eternal law the sun will rise at a certain hour in the morning. The sluggard does not deny it. He is entirely convinced of it. But what he knows is that it is precious cold at sunrise on a winter's morning, and it is very snug and warm between the blankets. What the sluggard needs is to be well shaken, and in case of need to be pulled out of bed. 'Roused,' the Revival calls it. And the Revival is a rouser rather than a teacher. And that is why I think those Churches which want to go on dozing in the ancient ways had better hold a special series of prayer meetings that the Revival may be prevented coming their way."*

I share this story for several reasons, not the least of which is that house church, like revival (and like the revival which I believe will soon be coming to the house church movement in America), is a rouser as well as a teacher. There is a difference between *cognitive* learning and *affective* learning. *Cognitive* learning has to do with imparting information and facts. *Affective* learning has to do with engaging our emotions in a way that leads to changed behavior. It is the difference between the head and the heart. This, I believe, was W. T. Stead's point.

Do you remember what the pastor of your church preached on six months ago? What about six weeks ago? No? Now, do you remember the last time you saw someone healed or delivered from demonic oppression? You can probably remember most, if not all, of the details! That was a "teachable moment" when *affective* learning (experiencing the power of God to heal) opened the door for *cognitive* learning (teaching on what Scripture says about God as our healer, etc.).

## Module 7: Life In The Kingdom - Discovering What It Means To Live Along The River - Page 141

We see this idea at work in the early house churches of the book of Acts: *And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe*" (Acts 2:42-43). The early church devoted itself to the apostle's "teaching." The word for "teaching" here (*didache*) refers to formal instruction regarding a body of doctrine. That was the "cognitive" side. But they **also** devoted themselves to fellowship, taking meals together and praying together (what I would call "affective learning" activities). The result was "a sense of awe" which led them to change their behavior (read the rest of Acts 2:43ff to see all the ways that the behavior of these early converts changed). In other words, what they were being taught (*cognitive learning*) was directly related to what they were experiencing (*affective learning*) on a daily basis. Teaching was not divorced from real life. So too, in our house churches we need both formal teaching that leads to *cognitive learning* and "experiential teaching" that leads to *affective learning* and changed lives. Cognitive learning and head knowledge alone will lead to pride (1 Corinthians 8:1) and sterility devoid of genuine practical application (i.e., changed lives). Experiential learning alone will eventually devolve into mysticism, sentimentality, error and an experience contrary to truth. House church leaders should be people who are able to teach so that teaching can take place regularly *as needed*.

So, once again, what is the role and place of teaching in house church? Remember that formal cognitive teaching alone (the kind of teaching most of us Christians are familiar with) is not "the secret ingredient" to a successful house church. God wants us to experience the entire body in all its various parts/gifts functioning together as we share meals together & worship together; through one person bringing a teaching, another person bringing a song, another praying for healing for others in the group, another exercising a gift of intercession to pray over those in need, and another bringing a prophetic word. All of these things working together will result in both cognitive and affective learning with the result that ***lives will be changed and the saints will be equipped and encouraged for greater service!***

### O.K. Let's Apply This

- ⇒ **Post Modern Application:** I have said elsewhere that Post Moderns want an experience of the truth before considering the truth of the experience. In essence, a Post Modern mind-set place *affective learning* (experiencing truth) ahead of *cognitive learning* (understanding truth). Our challenge is to communicate "propositional truth" (God is . . . .) in ways which are BOTH affective (engaging the heart) and cognitive (engaging the mind).
- ⇒ Be prepared to "teach on the go" in your house church, utilizing teachable moments that God supernaturally and sovereignly provides to engage in both affective ("here's the experience") and cognitive ("here's what the experience means") learning as God leads.



*Let the River flow . . . and allow Him to sovereignly give you teachable moments and open hearts, which those with teaching gifts can utilize to the building up of the body.*

### Let's Talk About That

I was in my Freshman year of Seminary when it happened. It was my first introduction to the annual Senior's preaching and Bible reading competition. In a nutshell, every year graduating Senior seminary students competed before a student and faculty panel. There were two categories: preaching and Bible reading (with money as the reward, of course). When I mentioned the upcoming competition to my Hebrew teacher, himself a graduating senior, he rolled his eyes and quipped, "Yea, I think they should have more categories. We should have a healing competition, a tongues speaking competition, and a 'raising the dead' competition." His tongue was firmly in his cheek by this point in the conversation. Christians love to preach. We always have. We encourage it. We teach people how to do it in our bible schools and seminaries. We even have competitions to see who is "the best" at it. And we build our church buildings and facilities to provide a platform for this particular style of communication.









In the New Testament there are two primary words that are often translated as "preach." The first is the Greek word *euangelidzo*. It occurs 61 times in the New Testament in 52 verses. It is used almost exclusively of proclaiming the good news of the gospel. From this Greek word we get our English word "evangelize." The emphasis is upon proclaiming a message of good news. The second New Testament word for "preach" is the Greek word - *kerusso*, which means "to be a herald." It often described an official herald and literally meant to perform the actions and to make the proclamation of a herald by making an official proclamation. This word appears some 63 times in 60 verses in the N.T. The basic concept here is "to proclaim." These two words occur *together* three times in the N.T., twice in the ministry of Jesus (Luke 4:18 & 8:1) and once in Paul's letter to the church at Rome (Romans 10:15). These two words form the basis for our concept of "preaching" and there is no question that such preaching held an important place in the life of the early church.

But there is a third word that was also important in the life of the New Testament church, but which seems to receive little attention in most churches today. It is the word - *dialogomai*, from which we derive our English word "dialogue." The word

## A Kingdom, A People & A River - Page 142

*dialegomai* comes from two Greek words, *dia* (a preposition meaning “through”) and - *lego* (a verb meaning “to talk,” hence, “to talk through”). In Classical and Hellenistic Greek (the Greek of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century world) this word was mostly used for “converse” or “discussion.” Later it came to mean “to negotiate.” It was used of a philosophical dialogue, debate or disputation. In Jewish writers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century such as Philo and Josephus over half of all occurrences had to do with “conversation.” W.E. Vine suggests that *dialegomai* primarily means “to think different things with oneself, hence, to ponder or to resolve in one’s mind, then, to converse; most frequently to reason or dispute with, not by way of a sermon, but by a discourse of a more conversational character.” In other words, it was a conversation, a dialogue, with an intent to persuade. For this reason it is often translated “reasoned.”

When we look at the Book of Acts (the missions book of the New Testament) we discover that the Apostle Paul preferred the concept of *dialegomai*. The word *euangelidzo* appears 7 times in Paul’s ministry in Acts (13:23; 14:7, 15, 21; 15:35; 16:10 & 17:18) and the word *kerusso* appears 2 times in Paul’s Acts ministry (Acts 20:25 & 28:31). But it was *dialegomai* that Paul preferred. In fact, it appears that a change of emphasis took place during Paul’s missionary journeys. From the time of Paul’s first missionary journey (see Acts 13:32) until his ministry in Athens during the second missionary journey the predominant word used to describe Paul’s message was *euangelidzo*. But the word never occurs after Acts 17:18 and Paul’s time in Athens. Instead, the word *dialegomai* becomes the predominant word throughout the remainder of Paul’s ministry (the last occurrence of *dialegomai* in Acts is with Felix in Caesarea in Acts 24:25). The word *dialegomai* is used 10 times in the book of Acts to describe Paul’s ministry:


-  **Acts 17:2** Paul reasoned in the Synagogue at Thessalonica.
-  **Acts 17: 17** Paul reasoned in the Synagogue and in the market place in Athens.
-  **Acts 18:4** Paul reasoned in the Synagogue at Corinth.
-  **Acts 18:19 (19:8)** Paul reasoned in the Synagogue in Ephesus.
-  **Acts 19:9** Paul reasoned in the School of Tyrannus in Ephesus.
-  **Acts 20:7 & 9** Paul reasoned with believers in a home.
-  **Acts 24:12** Paul refrained from reasoning in Jerusalem.
-  **Acts 24:25** Paul reasoned with Felix in Caesarea.

In his missionary activities Paul understood the importance of carrying on a “reasoned conversation,” a “dialogue.” He knew how to carry on such a conversation both with unbelievers he was seeking to lead to Christian faith, and with believers in house churches whom he was seeking to instruct and encourage in their faith (see Acts 20:7 & 9).

I fear that many Christians today have lost (or at least have failed to cultivate) the ability to carry on a genuine conversational dialogue, either with an unbeliever whom they want to lead to faith, or with a believer whom they are seeking to instruct or encourage (or whose views they are seeking to explore or to change). There are reasons why this has happened. If you don’t really know or understand what you believe or why you believe it, it is difficult to carry on a prolonged or in-depth conversation with someone whose questions are anything more than superficial. In addition, eloquent (or at least passionate) preaching tends to exalt the messenger, sometimes at the expense of the message.

House Churches are not particularly conducive to eloquent preaching, and not everyone can preach eloquently. But House Churches can be a safe place where people with questions and problems can enter into a dialogue, a reasoned discussion, regarding the questions and issues confronting them in their search for Christ, or in their search for a more fulfilling and informed walk with Him. We need to learn how to say, “**Let’s talk about that.**”

### O.K. Let’s Apply This

-  **Post Modern Application:** Post Moderns want to be part of a discussion regarding life, truth & spirituality. They do not want to simply be lectured or preached to by someone “standing three feet above contradiction.”
- Look for ways to engage your house church in dialogue about spiritual truths you are experiencing as a house church. Controlling and religious people struggle with dialogue because of their inability to control the discussion or its outcome. As a result they usually try to dominate the discussion.



Let the River flow . . . and allow Him to guide you into fruitful discussions about the things of God.

### Who Do I Make My Check Out To?

The last two lines of Isaac Watts' glorious hymn, "*When I Survey The Wondrous Cross*" declare, "Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all." Once, after this hymn had been sung in the Church of Saint Edmund, London, Father Ignatius repeated the last two lines of the hymn with great emphasis. Then he added, "Well, I am surprised to hear you sing that. Do you know that altogether you put only fifteen shillings in the collection bag this morning?" Not much has changed over the years. Christians today still sing better than they give!

Speaking to a house church conference which I attended in Denver, Wolfgang Simson observed that there are three primary issues facing the house church movement today: 1) Restoring what is church, 2) Defining how Christians are to work or network together, and 3) How Christians handle money. I agree, and I believe that how the house church movement handles the issue of giving among its members will determine much of its future effectiveness.

I believe that most Christians today have not yet undergone an "Apostolic Conversion" of their finances. Most "Christian financial counseling" is little more than secular financial advice with bible verses and lessons on tithing and debt included to make middle class Christians comfortable that they are being "good stewards." Hardly an "Apostolic Conversion" of our financial lives. If the House Church movement is to grow and prosper as God's new paradigm for the recovery of New Testament Church, then this "Apostolic Conversion" of our finances must take place. For this reason I have included (and am now suggesting that you take time to read) a detailed treatment of finances in Appendix A entitled, "*House Church and Radical Sacrificial Giving*."



### O.K. Let's Apply This

- ⇒ **Post Modern Application:** Because Post Moderns are suspicious of "institutions" they are also skeptical of where the money goes in those institutions. Rather than giving to build the new \$11 million church campus, they would rather give to the needs of people. We have a responsibility to see that house church finances are well spent (no Rolex or Lexus for the Apostle kind of nonsense) and invested in the Kingdom.
- ⇒ Read and discuss the article on "*House Church and Radical Sacrificial Giving*" in Appendix A.



Let the River flow . . . and allow Him to bring about an "Apostolic Conversion" regarding your finances and the Kingdom of God.

### Keeping The Main Thing The Main Thing


We have a saying that I try to emphasize with everyone involved in our house church circle. It goes like this. "*Remember that the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.*" Read that again. Do you get it? If not, don't go forward until you do. This is really critical, because we Christians are easily distracted. So, let me ask you. When the Church assembles together for worship and ministry, what is the main thing? In other words, **What are we doing here?**


We can begin to answer this question by asking another question. When we look at the early Church in the Book of Acts, and elsewhere in the New Testament, what did they regard to be the main thing? **Answer:** In the early New Testament Church the main thing was Jesus, particularly in His resurrection power and glory. Their message was that the Kingdom of God had come, the Resurrection of Jesus was the proof, and the outpouring of the Spirit was the sign and seal that they were indeed living in the "last days" as promised by the prophet Joel. At the end of this module I have included a chart which shows 17 sermons from the book of Acts. When you examine these 17 sermons, "the main thing" is quickly apparent. When the 11 Apostles chose a replacement for Judas the specific mandate was that this person "*should become a witness with us of His resurrection.*" The resurrected Jesus was "the main thing." The power promised to the waiting Church in Acts 1:8 was power to be His witnesses. And that witness was specifically a witness to the resurrected, living Jesus. On six different occasions we are told that the early church was a witness to the events surrounding the resurrected Christ (See Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39-41, 13:30-31). And the resurrection of Jesus is mentioned some 19 times in the preaching and ministry of the early church. Without the resurrected, living & exalted Jesus everything else falls apart, and our faith is in vain (see 1 Corinthians 15). For this reason, it should come as no surprise that Jesus Himself placed His death and resurrection at the heart of every gathering of believers by commanding a specific act to be observed when we gather. Remember? We refer to it as the Lord's Supper. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 11:26 that, "*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the*


## A Kingdom, A People & A River - Page 144

*cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.*" This is why, whenever I lead a celebration of the Lord's Table, I usually read Paul's words from 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. I do this, not because I can't think of anything else to do, but because, scripturally and practically it brings our focus back to "the main thing". Jesus' death and resurrection is the main thing; it is the center of all we do. Everything else (i.e., power for ministry, spiritual gifts, evangelism, etc.) flows from the resurrection power of our Lord Jesus Christ as it is poured out upon His worshipping church.

### O.K. Let's Apply This

 **Post Modern Application:** From a Post Modern perspective, remembering "*the main thing*" by observing the Lord's Table together as a house church family/community is **Experiential, Participatory, Image-Driven, and Connected**. In other words, it meets all of Sweet's definitions of a genuine Post Modern worship experience. That isn't why we do it, but it is nice to know!

 House Church is not about patriarchy, prophecy, eschatology, Calvinistic or Arminian theology, social or political action. We meet to worship the resurrected Jesus, to minister mutually to His body, to empower and equip one another to worship and serve Him more effectively, and to bear personal witness to His death and resurrection. **He is the main thing.**

 *Let the River flow . . . and allow Him to empower you, just as He did the early Church, to be a witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus!*

### Taking Our Place In The Drama (or, Does Doctrine Matter?)

*"Be not ashamed of your faith; remember it is the ancient gospel of martyrs, confessors, reformers and saints. Above all, it is 'the truth of God', against which the gates of Hell cannot prevail. Let your lives adorn your faith, let your example adorn your creed. Above all live in Christ Jesus, and walk in Him, giving credence to no teaching but that which is manifestly approved of Him, and owned by the Holy Spirit. Cleave fast to the Word of God which is here mapped out for you." C.H. Spurgeon*

Please forgive me, but it has been 25 years since I last saw the Peanuts cartoon posted on Dr. Bruce Shelley's office door at seminary. So my recollection of it may not be precise, but it is still vivid and pointed. Linus and his sister Lucy are standing at a window watching it rain. Lucy wonders if there will be another catastrophic flood. In response Linus quotes God's promise from Genesis 9 regarding the rainbow and the promise not to destroy the earth again with a flood. Lucy says this has set her mind at ease. Quips Linus, "*Yes, good theology has a way of doing that!*"

As Linus so adeptly pointed out, in the final analysis, it really does matter what we believe. People and groups that casually (but fervently) declare, "*We have no creed but Christ*" do, in reality, beg the question of "Which Christ"? Which Jesus do they worship: the "cosmic Christ" of the New Age movement, the gnostic Jesus of the Aquarian gospel, the Jesus of Mormonism or the Jehovah's Witnesses? Eventually, doctrinal issues will arise and questions will need to be clearly answered in order to avoid what I call "spiritual hodge-podge" (commonly expressed today with one word: "whatever"! ). So, what do you believe? What body of beliefs (dare we use the word "doctrine"?) brings truth, stability, hope and comfort to your turbulent world, providing the guideposts for your personal journey into the Kingdom of God? While truth in Scripture is ultimately rooted in a person (Jesus said, "I am the way, the TRUTH and the life"), it is also propositional (Our God is a consuming fire" or "God is love"). What set of propositions guides your journey?

In the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century a heated debate erupted between what was then described as the "Fundamentalists" and the "Modernists" or "Liberals." The debate

### Providence

Providence is  
the almighty and ever present power of God  
by which He upholds, as with His hand,  
heaven and earth  
and all creatures,  
and so rules them that  
leaf and blade,  
rain and drought,  
fruitful and lean years,  
food and drink,  
health and sickness,  
prosperity and poverty  
~ all things, in fact, ~  
come to us  
not by chance  
but by His fatherly hand.

We can be patient when things go against us,  
thankful when things go well,  
and for the future we can have  
good confidence in our faithful God and Father  
that nothing will separate us from His love.

All creatures are so completely in His hand  
that without His will  
they can neither move nor be moved.

### The Heidelberg Catechism

was between those who held to what they regarded as the “fundamentals” of the Christian faith (They even published twelve paperback volumes between 1910 and 1915 called “The Fundamentals”) and those who held to a liberal “higher critical” view of Scripture that called into question many basic historic items of Christian faith. The “Fundamentalists” as they came to be called (because they maintained the necessity of certain “fundamental” doctrines) argued that there were at least five “essential (or fundamental) truths” that distinguished genuine Christianity from its liberal counterpart. Those five “essential truths” were: 1) the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible; 2) the deity of Christ and His virgin birth; 3) the substitutionary atonement of Christ’s death; 4) the literal resurrection of Christ from the dead; and 5) the literal return of Christ.

Some sixty years ago, in the wake of the Fundamentalist-Modernist debate, British author and apologist Dorothy Sayers wrote an excellent little book entitled, *“Creed or Chaos? Why Christians Must Choose Either Dogma or Disaster (Or, Why It Really Does Matter What You Believe).”* Here is Ms. Sayers opening salvo against those who, both then and now, maintain that doctrine and dogma are unimportant.


*“Official Christianity, of late years, has been having what is known as ‘a bad press.’ We are constantly assured that the churches are empty because preachers insist too much upon doctrine - ‘dull dogma,’ as people call it. The fact is the precise opposite. It is the neglect of dogma that makes for dullness. The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man - and the dogma is the drama. That drama is summarized quite clearly in the Creeds of the Church, and if we think it dull, it is because we either have never really read those amazing documents, or have recited them so often and so mechanically as to have lost all sense of their meaning. The plot pivots upon a single character, and the whole action is the answer to a single central problem: **What think ye of Christ?**”*

Ms. Sayer’s point was simple and clear. What we as Christians have historically believed, and continue to believe to this day, has been clearly stated and defined in the historic Creeds and Confessions of the Church. It is these Creeds and Confessions which provide the boundaries of historic Christian and biblical orthodoxy. To use the imagery developed by Ms. Sayers, they detail both the **dogma** (from the Greek, *dokeo*, meaning “to think or believe,” hence, that which we believe, doctrine) and the **drama** of what God has done in Christ on our behalf, and what we are called upon to do in response.

The image of a drama is a biblical image. In 1 Corinthians 4:9 Paul tells the Corinthians that *“we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.”* The word translated “spectacle” is the Greek word *theatron* from which we get our English word “theater.” Paul is declaring that our lives as Christians are a divine and cosmic drama, a theatrical performance, that is being watched by the whole created order, including both men and angels. What are we “acting out” in our daily lives? We are acting out what we believe to be true regarding God, His Word and the truths of Scripture as we understand them. Do our lives demonstrate the truth of what we profess to believe? Men and angels are watching to see how we perform our part in this great cosmic drama of the Providence of God.

### **O.K. Let’s Apply This**

- ⇒ **Post Modern Application:** The Post Modern leaning of our culture, both inside and outside of the church, causes people to value personal experience (affective learning) over being told what to believe (cognitive learning) by some religious authority. As believers committed to absolute Biblical truth we must continue to teach solid doctrine, but in a manner which relates to and interprets life and experience. Helping others understand the reality of the cosmic drama and our role in it will go further than trying to convince people that they really should memorize the Westminster Shorter Catechism.
- ⇒ Identify some standard teaching tools and reference works which you can refer to for teaching basic doctrine or as reference tools which you refer people to in order to resolve doctrinal disputes. For example, two excellent beginner books for new believers are **“Know What You Believe”** and **“Know Why You Believe”** both by Paul Little. For a good contemporary theology reference work get a copy of **“Systematic Theology”** by Wayne Grudem.

 *Let the River flow . . . and allow Him to empower you to take your place in the unfolding cosmic drama of sin and redemption.*

### **Fred Astaire, House Church & A Time To Dance**

O.K. I confess. I love old movies. I’m one of those aficionados who genuinely believes that the best overall movie ever made was (and still is) *“Casablanca”* (Yep, I have the 50<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary Edition, just in case you were wondering - which you probably weren’t). When my wife and I are in the mood for a movie, we often turn to an old classic. And nothing is more classic than watching and old song & dance musical. Even as I write this I’m watching an old Fred Astaire movie (The Band Wagon) in which he dances with Cyd Charisse to the music of “Dancing In The Dark.” Talk about beautiful music combined with incredible gracefulness. It’s the story of two very different dancers who must learn to dance together, despite their

## A Kingdom, A People & A River - Page 146

differences. O.K., if you think that's tough, in "*Royal Wedding*" Fred Astaire dances with . . . a hat rack, and he makes the hat rack look good and the whole thing look easy!

So, what's all this got to do with house church you ask? Well, as my daughter says when we're translating Greek together, "Wait for it, dad, wait for it!" If you ask the question "What is house church?" among house church participants you'll get a wide variety of answers, which reflect the varying interests and emphasis of the different house churches. If you were to visit on one particular evening devoted to prayer and worship, you might conclude (both rightly and wrongly) that house church was a prayer meeting. If you were to visit on a different night when teaching was being emphasized you might conclude (again, rightly and wrongly) that house church is all about teaching. On yet another night when a mature 5-fold prophetic individual is ministering you might conclude that house church is all about a ministry of giving and receiving prophetic words. And on still another night when God is moving and all the gifts are functioning through many people you might conclude that house church is borderline pandemonium (and you would be right . . . and wrong . . . again!). By now you should be getting the point, namely, that house church is about all of these things, and yet, it is about NONE of these things. So, allow me to return now to my dancing metaphor. House church, like our individual relationships with God, is about learning to dance with God . . . and then with each other. Dancing represents a very intimate relationship between two people. It requires communication, practice, allowing someone else to lead (control!) while you and I follow, and becoming so intimately acquainted with another person that you can sense (and eventually anticipate) their every move by looking in their eye or watching the inflection of their body. And it requires a deep level of trust. If you have ever watched ice dancers in the Olympic games, then you have seen the intricate moves which require each partner to trust one another, often at substantial personal risk. But when it comes together it is beautiful to watch. I still vividly remember Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean performing their intricate and intimate dance to Ravel's "Bolero" at the 1984 Winter Olympics in Sarajevo (earning them 12 perfect 6.0s and a gold medal). Wow.

O.K., let's go back to the question. What is house church? At its most basic and intimate level, house church is the pursuit of God in the company of friends who are learning to dance . . . with God and with one another. Is house church about more than that. Yes, of course it is. Revival, church planting, city-reaching, neighborhood and community transformation, and much more. But ultimately, all of those "other things" are dependent for their success upon people and house churches who have discovered, practiced and are leaning the intricate and intimate art of dancing with God and with one another.

Several years ago blind Christian recording artist Ken Medema did a song that I'll never forget. I don't recall the title and have since lost the album (bigger than a CD and played on something called a "record player" - just in case you were wondering). But the words went like this:

He asked me to dance though I'd never tried dancing before,  
I had visions of saints & angels laughing us right off the floor,  
Although I protested it just wouldn't be any good,  
He gently insisted and finally I told him I would.  
Unforgettable, he was the coming of Spring on a cold winter's day;  
Unforgettable, he taught this singer to sing in a whole new way.

So, tell me. How are your dancing skills, both with God and with other believers in your house church? This is a challenge for those of us who have grown up and spent most of our Christian lives in what I call the "rationalistic wing" of the church, where what little dancing that occurs is very carefully scripted and choreographed to make everyone look good. Unfortunately we want to bring this carefully rehearsed script into house church, and the results thus far have been , , , disappointing. As the coming season of spiritual awakening and outpouring begins, I believe God is once again going to teach His people the intimate and intricate art of dancing with Him and with each other. There is a certain degree of risk here, the risk of "*saints & angels laughing us right off the floor*". But trust me (and I'm still learning this). If Fred Astaire can dance with a hat rack and make it look good and easy, chances are that Jesus can dance with you and make it . . . *unforgettable*.



*Let The River Flow!*

## Questions For Reflection And Discussion

- ⇒ What did you learn from the story of Samuel, Susanna and John Wesley? Based on their experiences, what do you see as the difference between being a “religious swimming pool” and being a channel for the flow of God’s spirit?
- ⇒ When it comes to getting started as the *ekklesia* in your home, what is preventing you from “just doing it”?
- ⇒ What kind of religious, spiritual or emotional baggage do you see yourself carrying around. What baggage has other people pointed out to you? What steps are you taking to deal with it so that it doesn’t become an issue in your house church?
- ⇒ What day of the week would you want your house church to meet on? Why? Describe a place, other than your home, where you have considered starting a gathering.
- ⇒ Discuss a time of significant fellowship which you have experienced over a meal with other people. List some ways you could encourage such times of fellowship and meal sharing in your house church.
- ⇒ Have you ever been “mistreated” by either church leaders or others in authority? How has that experience colored your view of leadership in house church? Describe your understanding of leadership in house church now.
- ⇒ Describe your ideal worship experience. Have you ever experienced it and is it realistic? Is it self-centered or self-sacrificing? How would you relate it your worship in a house church setting?
- ⇒ Relate a time in your life when an experience in your life (*affective learning*) brought about a “teachable moment” and led you to ask questions (*cognitive learning*) and to dig deeper into understanding the things of God. How does this type of learning relate to your house church experience?
- ⇒ Describe an experience in your life when you engaged in a dialogue with an unbeliever regarding your faith. How did that dialogue challenge or strengthen your faith?
- ⇒ Describe your understanding of radical sacrificial giving ins Scripture, and compare that understanding with your own giving practices. How would your life and ministry be different if you practiced radical sacrificial giving?
- ⇒ Describe what you see as your part in God’s cosmic drama. How does your role in what God is doing challenge you to become the *ekklesia* which meets in your home and your neighborhood?

## A Kingdom, A People & A River - Page 148

### A "Life In The Kingdom" Reading List

Banks, Robert and Stevens, R. Paul. ***Thinking About Church Life***. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press. 2005.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. ***Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community***. New York: Harpercollins Publishing. 1978.

Chesterton, G.K. ***Orthodoxy***. Mineola: Dover Publications. 2004.

Dale, Tony & Felicity. ***Simply Church***. Austin, TX: Karis Publications. 2002

Deere, Jack. ***Surprised By The Power of the Spirit***. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 1993.

Lamb, Richard. ***The Pursuit of God In The Company of Friends***. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press. 2003.

Little, Paul E. ***Know Why You Believe***. Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries. 2005

\_\_\_\_\_ ***Know What You Believe***. Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries. 2005

Luther, Martin. ***Tabletalk: Luther's Comments on Life, the Church and the Bible***. Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-Shire Tain GBR: Christian Focus Publications. 2003.

Meier, Paul and Wise, Robert. ***Windows of the Soul: A Look At Dreams and Their Meanings***. Nashville: Thomas Nelson. 1995.

Neighbor, Jr. Ralph W. ***The Shepherd's Guidebook***. Revised Edition. Houston: Touch Publications. 1994.

Peck, M. Scott. ***The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace***. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. New York: Touchstone/Simon & Schuster. 1998.

Ryle, James. ***A Dream Come True: A Biblical Look At How God Speaks Through Dreams and Visions***. Orlando: Creation House. 1995.

Sayers, Dorothy L. ***Creed or Chaos?: Why Christians Must Choose Either Dogma or Disaster (or, Why It Really Does Matter What You Believe)***. Manchester: Sophia Institute Press. 1996.

Spangler, Ann. ***Dreams: True Stories of Remarkable Encounters With God***. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House. 1997.

The Message of The Early Church In The Book of Acts		
Occasion	How The Early Church Kept " <i>The Main Thing</i> " The Main Thing	Reference
Peter at Pentecost	Holy Spirit as Fulfillment of Joel 2/ The <b>Resurrection</b> Prophesied/ We are <b>Witnesses</b> / Jesus Ascended & Exalted/ Repent/ Promised Gift of Holy Spirit	Acts 2:14-40
Peter In The Temple	Healing Glorifies Jesus/ <b>God Raised Him Up</b> / We Are <b>Witnesses</b> / Faith in His Name/ The Prophets Foretold/ Bless you by turning you from wicked ways	Acts 3:12-26
Peter to Sanhedrin	The power & the Name/ The Name of Jesus Heals/ <b>God Raised Him Up</b> / Stone Builders Rejected/ Salvation in no other Name	Acts 4:5-12
Peter to Council	Obey God not Men/ <b>God Raised up Jesus</b> / Jesus Exalted to God's Right Hand/ A Savior to Grant Repentance & Forgiveness/ We & Holy Spirit Are <b>Witnesses</b>	Acts 5:29-32
Stephen to Sanhedrin	Review of Jewish History/ You Are Just like Your Father Who Killed the Prophets/ You Betrayed & Murdered the Righteous One	Acts 7
Peter to Cornelius	God Doesn't Show Partiality/ The Ministry of Jesus/ <b>God Raised Him Up</b> / We are <b>Witnesses</b> / Jesus Appointed by God as Judge of the Living and the Dead/ Prophets Bear <b>Witness</b> That All Who Believe In His Name Receive Forgiveness of Sins	Acts 10:34-43
Peter to Church in Jerusalem	What God Has Cleansed, no longer consider unholy	Acts 11:4-17
Paul in Synagogue at Pisidian Antioch	From the Offspring of David, according to Promise, God has raised up a Savior/ God <b>raised Him up</b> according to the Scriptures/ Through Him Forgiveness of sins is proclaimed/ Through Him everyone is freed-justified from the Law.	Acts 13:16-41
Peter to Jerusalem Council	"We believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus."	Acts 15:6-11
James To Jerusalem Council	Gentile Converts are free from the requirements of the Law, including circumcision.	Acts 15:13-21
Paul on Mars Hill in Athens	The God Who Made Heaven & earth has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having given proof to all men by <b>raising Him from the dead</b> .	Acts 17:22-31
Paul to Ephesian Elders	"Testifying to both Jews & Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ"/ "Testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God"	Acts 20:17-35
Paul to Jews in Jerusalem	Paul's testimony of his conversion and calling to the Gentiles	Acts 22:1-21
Paul to Sanhedrin	"I am on trial for the hope of the <b>resurrection</b> of the dead!"	Acts 23:1-6
Paul Before Felix	"Having a hope in God . . . that there shall certainly be a <b>resurrection</b> of both the righteous and the wicked."	Acts 24:10-21
Paul Before King Agrippa	Paul's testimony/ "I stand to this day testifying both to small and great . . . that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His <b>resurrection</b> from the dead He should be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."	Acts 26:1-23
Paul to Jewish Leaders at Rome	"He was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about <b>the kingdom of God</b> , and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets."	Acts 28:23-29

